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ABSTRACT

This study examined the possibility that aspiring parents' and teachers' recalled experience with elementary school subjects affects their academic expectations for young children. The recalled experience of 103 university students majoring in education was measured by questions that asked: (1) how difficult and interesting each subject was for them; (2) how hard they had to work at each subject; (3) how high their marks were in each subject; and (4) how well they could assist young children in each subject. Academic expectations were measured by questions that asked the students: (1) how difficult and interesting they expected each subject to be for a child entering first grade; (2) how hard they expected the child would have to work at each subject; and (3) what school marks they expected the child would receive in each subject. Results indicated that the greater the participants' recalled difficulty with a subject and the harder they had to work in that subject, the more difficult they expected the subject to be for the child and the harder they expected the child to have to work. The higher the participants' recalled interest in a subject and the more they believed they could help the child, the higher the school mark they expected of the child. A list of 17 references is included. (Author/BC)

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Aspiring Parents' and Teachers' Academic Expectations for Young Children: Effects of Adults' Experiential Variables

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if the recalled experience with school subjects (math, music, physical education, reading, social studies) in elementary school from the participants in this study, who were college students aspiring to become parents and teachers, affected their academic expectations for young children. Participants' recalled experience was measured by questions that asked how difficult and interesting each school subject was for them; how hard they had to work at each school subject, how high their marks were and how high a mark they expected to get if they took these school subjects again, and how well they believed they could assist young children in each school subject if the latter needed help. Academic expectations were measured by questions that asked participants to indicate how difficult and how interesting they expected each school subject to be for a young child (one who was entering grade one in school), how hard they expected the young child to work at each school subject, and how high a school mark in each school subject they expected the young child to receive when the first report card came home. Results showed that aspiring parents' and teachers' recalled experience with the different school subjects while in elementary school affected their expectations for young children with regard to these school subjects. The implications of these findings are discussed.

Aspiring Parents' and Teachers' Academic Expectations for Young Children: Effects of Adults' Experiential Variables

Research has shown that adults' aspirations and expectations for achievement is an important source of influence on children's intellectual/academic achievement (see, e.g., Hess & Holloway, 1984; Scott-Jones, 1984). A positive relationship has been established in earlier research between adults' expectations for children's achievement behaviors and children's actual achievement-related behaviors (see, e.g., Crandall, 1969; Rosen & D'Andrade, 1959; Winterbottom, 1958). Adults' aspirations and expectations are considered important because they may serve as cognitive mediators of adults' behaviors toward children (Hess, 1981; Scott-Jones, 1984), thereby influencing the achievement behaviors of children. Thus, other things being equal, one might expect that an adult who has high expectation for a child to do well in school is likely to monitor the child more closely, which in turn might be expected to lead to a higher level of achievement on the part of the child.

Research in the area of adults' expectations often focuses on socioeconomic status (SES) and sex differences in intellectual/academic performance (see, e.g., Marcus & Corsini, 1978; Entwisle & Baker, 1983; Rodman & Voydanoff, 1978), and on older children, those who are in the

intermediate grades and higher (see, e.g., a review by Seginer, 1983). Relatively little research in the area of adults' expectations has been conducted for younger (primary grades) children.

In studies on adults' expectations for young children, the focus is often on the academic performance of young children as influenced by the gender of the young child. Both Entwisle and Baker (1983) and Leung (1990), for example, found that a young child's gender elicits differential academic expectations from adults.

Apart from the finding that the gender of children affects adults' expectations for them, research also has shown that adults' expectations for children are influenced by a number of variables associated with the child, including social-class background (see, e.g., Adams & Cohen, 1976; Cooper, Baron, & Lowe, 1975), prior information (see, e.g., Cooper, 1979), and ethnicity (see, e.g., Wong, 1980).

In a study with 124 college students enrolling in education courses, Cooper (1979), for example, found that the participants' expectations for a hypothetical third-grade child were influenced by prior information concerning the child's academic ability. Specifically, Cooper (1979) found that participants expected a third-grade child who was reportedly to have higher spelling ability to perform better and one with lower spelling ability to perform poorer on a subsequent spelling test.

Similarly, Wong (1980) found that Asian students, both elementary and secondary, were expected to be more academically competent and emotionally stable than their white counterparts by their teachers.

While the above studies showed that characteristics of children influenced adults' expectations for them, few, if any, studies have reported on how the characteristics of adults themselves (e.g., their recalled past experience) may influence their expectations for children. The purpose of this study, which is part of a larger study on aspiring parents' and teachers' expectations for young children, was, therefore, to determine if adults' recalled experience with the different school subjects (e.g., math, reading) while in elementary school would affect their academic expectations for a young child with regard to these same school subjects. Given that characteristics of children were found to affect adults' expectations for them, as described previously, and given the findings of Parsons and Ruble (1977), which showed that school-age children's prior performance on a task influenced their expectations for subsequent performance on the task, one might speculate that adults' academic expectations for young children also might be affected by their own recalled past academic experience. The hypothesis in this study was, therefore, that there would be a significant relationship between adults' recalled past experience with the school subjects and their academic

expectations for young children with regard to these same school subjects.

The population of aspiring parents and teachers was chosen to be studied because this population of adults will have direct influence on children, and findings concerning factors that would affect their expectations for children would make a positive contribution to the body of knowledge in the area of adult expectations for children. Furthermore, the present study has important educational implications in that if the findings indicate that aspiring parents' and teachers' expectations for children are influenced by their recalled past experience, then it would become necessary to draw this to their attention, and to help them avoid forming expectations that are inappropriate for children, thereby helping to promote the development of children under their care.

Recalled past experience rather than past experience per se was a focus in this study because one might expect that it is participants' current recalling of past experience rather than their actual experience (i.e., the subjective rather than the objective aspects of experience) that might be expected to affect their expectations.

One might note here that in previously reported studies (e.g., Entwisle & Baker, 1983), the focus tended to be on two school subjects, specifically arithmetic and reading. The other school subjects, physical education, music, and social studies, have not been given attention. Further, few

studies to date have reported on adults' expectations as to how difficult and how interesting the different school subjects are for young children and also how hard they will have to work at each school subject.

In the present study, therefore, an attempt was made to determine if aspiring parents' and teachers' recalled experience as to how difficult and how interesting each school subject was for them, how hard they had to work, and how well they performed at each school subject while they were in elementary school would affect their expectations for young children. The expectations consisted of how difficult and how interesting aspiring parents and teachers expected each school subject to be for a young child, how hard they expected the young child would have to work, and also how well they expected a young child to perform at each school subject.

Method

Participants. The participants in the study were 103 male and female students at a public university in east central Wisconsin. All participants were white and were majoring in education intending to become teachers. There were 28 males and 75 females in the sample. Almost all of these students were either college juniors or seniors. These participants were recruited by the investigator on a voluntary basis. Specifically, as part of class activities in an education course, the students in the class were informed by the investigator that he was conducting a study

on adults' expectation on young children and their voluntary participation in the study was encouraged. For those who decided not to partake, an alternative activity was provided. Practically all students in the classes volunteered to take part in the study.

Material. A questionnaire was used in this study. The questionnaire first asked the participants to indicate their birthday, gender, whether or not they were a parent, and if they were not a parent, whether they expected to become a parent someday. (Only participants who indicated that they were not presently parents but expected to become parents someday were included in subsequent data analyses. These participants constituted about 90% of the total class enrollments). The questionnaire then asked the participants to assume that they had a 6-year-old son (daughter) who would soon be entering grade one in school. This was asked of the participants to help them focus their attention on a child of the same target age. The questionnaire then asked the participants to indicate how high they expected the child's school mark in each school subject would be when the first report card came home, using a scale from 1 (very high) to 4 (very low). The participants were also asked to indicate how difficult, how interesting they expected each school subject to be for their young child and how hard they expected that their young child would have to work at each school subject. The school subjects to which the aspiring parents and teachers were asked to respond were: math,

music, physical education (P.E.), reading, and social studies. These are the school subjects that are commonly taught in the elementary schools and they were listed in that order in the questionnaire, i.e., alphabetically. The participants were then asked to indicate how high their marks were and how hard they had to work at each school subject while they were in elementary school. They were also asked to indicate how difficult and how interesting each school subject was for them, how high they expected their marks to be if they were to take these same school subjects again, and how well they believed they could assist their young child in each school subject if their young child needed help.

Procedure. As noted earlier, the participants were recruited to participate in this study on a voluntary basis by the investigator. Participants who volunteered to participate in this study were given a copy of the questionnaire to complete anonymously in the classroom as part of class activities. Half of the male and half of the female participants were each given a copy of the questionnaire in which the 6-year-old child was described as a son while the other half of the participants were given a copy of the questionnaire in which the 6-year-old child was described as a daughter. This procedure was undertaken so that an equal number of male and female participants would focus their responses on either a boy or a girl and they thus would not be directly comparing boys with girls. It was

emphasized to the participants that the questionnaire aimed to obtain their feelings/opinions only and, therefore, there were no right or wrong answers. They were told that they were always free to choose whether or not to answer a particular question. The investigator was available to answer or clarify any questions that the participants had and debriefed the participants on the purpose of the study after they all completed the questionnaire.

Results

Because of the relatively small sample size for males (n=28) and also because the focus was on aspiring parents and teachers as a whole rather than males and females separately, the data for males and females were, therefore, analyzed as a group rather than separately in all subsequent data analyses.

To determine if the participants' recalled experience with the different school subjects while in elementary school (e.g., how difficult math was for them, how interesting math was for them, how hard they had to work at math, how high their school mark was for math, how well they believed they could help their child with math if asked to help) affected their expectations for the young child in each area of expectation (e.g., how difficult they expected math to be for the child, how interesting they expected math to be for the child, how hard they expected the child had to work at math, how high a school mark in math they expected the child to get) with regard to these same school subjects,

a series of stepwise multiple regression analyses were performed. The dependent measures were the participants' responses to the questions that asked them to indicate their expectations for the young child in each area of expectation (difficulty, interest, hard work, and school mark) in each school subject. The predictor variables were the participants' responses to the questions that asked them to indicate their recalled experience in elementary school with regard to each school subject (again, e.g., how difficult math was for them, how interesting math was for them, how hard they had to work at math, how high their school mark was for math, how well they believed they could help their child with math if asked to help). The results are summarized in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

As can be seen from Table 1, the greater the participants' recalled difficulty with a school subject, and the harder they recalled they had to work for that school subject while in elementary school, the greater they expected the school subject to be difficult for their young child, and the harder they expected their young child to work for that school subject. Also, the data in Table 1 indicate that the greater the participants' recalled interest in a school subject while in elementary school, the

greater they expected the school subject to be interesting for their young child.

Also, as can be seen from the bottom panel of Table 1, various experiential variables of the participants were found to be significant predictors for the school mark in a school subject expected of the child. The more prevalent among these experiential variables are the participants' recalled interest in a school subject and also how well they believed they could help their child if their child needed help in a school subject. Specifically, the higher the participants' recalled interest in a school subject, and also the better they believed they could help their child if their child needed help in a school subject, the higher the school mark in a school subject they expected of the child.

Participants' recalled experience with each of the five school subjects while in elementary school (i.e., recalled difficulty, interest, hard work, and school mark) along with the mark they indicated they would expect to get if they were to take these school subjects again and how well they believed they could help their child if their child needed help were also intercorrelated. The results are presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

As can be seen from Table 2, the pattern of intercorrelations among participants' recalled experience

with the school subjects was both interesting and informative. For example, these intercorrelations show that the higher the participants' recalled interest in a school subject, the less the participants' recalled difficulty with that school subject, and also the less hard they recalled they had to work for that school subject. The intercorrelations also show that the higher the participants' recalled interest in a school subject, the higher their recalled school mark in that school subject, and the better they believed they could assist their young child if their child needed help in that school subject.

Also, as can be seen from the intercorrelations in Table 2, the higher the participants' recalled school mark for a school subject, the less the participants' recalled difficulty with that school subject, and the less hard they recalled they had to work for that school subject, and the better they believed they could assist their young child in that school subject if their child needed help.

Discussion

As noted earlier, the data in Table 1 indicate that participants' recalled experience with the school subjects while in elementary school served as a useful predictor for their expectations in these same school subjects for their young child. Previous research (see, e.g., Parsons & Ruble, 1977; Maehr & Braskamp, 1986) indicates that one's past experience in an achievement situation influences one's beliefs, expectations, and motivations about those

achievement situations. The findings from the present study seem to amplify those of these researchers and show that one's recalled experience with the school subjects affects one's beliefs and expectations about these same school subjects even for one's young children. More specifically, the present findings suggest that one's expectations for one's own young children with regard to school work tend to be based on one's own recalled experience with school work. Thus, for example, if one recalled that math was difficult or uninteresting for oneself, one tends to expect that math would also be difficult or uninteresting for one's young child. In as much as one's expectations may be expected to affect one's behaviors, this empirical evidence suggests that one should guard against making expectations on young children based on one's recalled past experience. For making expectations on young children based on one's own recalled past experience rather than the child's individual characteristics and predilections may impede the development of the child.

As one can see from Table 2, recalled interest in a particular school subject was found to relate to other measures of recalled experience with that school subject. For example, the more interesting a particular school subject was recalled, the less hard the participants recalled they had to work and the higher their recalled school mark for that school subject. These findings on participants' recalled interest in the school subjects while

in elementary school thus seem to show the importance of interest in the school subjects, and they suggest the importance of fostering students' interest in the school subjects.

Also, as can be seen from Table 2, participants' recalled difficulty, interest, the extent as to how hard they had to work and their school mark for a school subject while in elementary school were all related to how well they believed they could help their child if their child needed help in a school subject. This suggests that participants' recalled past experience with a school subject influences their perceived ability to help a child in that school subject. This finding thus again shows how one's recalled past experience can affect one's subsequent beliefs and expectations.

Taken together, the findings of the present study show that aspiring parents' and teachers' recalled past experience with the school subjects serves as a useful predictor for their academic expectations for young children. Moreover, the measures of this recalled past experience show interesting patterns of intercorrelations among them.

The implication of these findings is that aspiring parents and teachers should be aware of this relationship between their recalled past experience with the school subjects and their expectations for young children with regard to these same school subjects. It is important not

only to draw these findings to the attention of aspiring parents and teachers, but also to educate them that expectations for children should be formed on a realistic basis consistent with the child's individual characteristics and predilections and not on the basis of adults' own recalled past experience. Thus, for example, it is important for aspiring parents and teachers not to expect a child to be interested in math simply because they recalled they were themselves interested in math. Moreover, it is important for them to keep in mind that if an adult expects a school subject to be interesting for a young child, it does not necessarily mean that the child will indeed find that school subject interesting. The same is true for expected difficulty in a school subject and also how hard one has to work at a school subject. The point to be emphasized is that one's expectations on young children should be formed on a realistic basis consistent with the child's individual characteristics and predilections.

The present study also shows that adults' recalled past experience with the school subjects affects their perceived ability to help their children with these school subjects if their children need help. The implication of this finding is that helping students to perform well in school has long-range consequences. This is the case because students who are performing poorly in school now tend to grow up to be adults lacking in confidence of being able to help (and most likely are ill-equipped to actually help) future generations

of students who need help in their school work. In this way, they contribute to a vicious cycle of poor academic performance of students. Students who are performing well in school now, on the other hand, will tend to grow up to be adults confident of their ability to help (and most likely can also actually help) future generations of students who need help in their school work. In this way, they contribute to the academic success of succeeding generations of students.

In summary, one may conclude that the findings from the present study contributes to the understanding of adults' expectations for children. It documents empirical evidence to show that characteristics of the adults influence their expectations of young children. More specifically, the findings show that aspiring parents' and teachers' recalled experience with the different school subjects while in elementary school affected their expectations for young children with regard to these school subjects. The major implication of the findings is that adults' expectations for children should be formed on a realistic basis consistent with each child's individual uniqueness and not on the basis of adults' own recalled past experience.

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Table 1

Multiple Regression Analysis Summary: Participants' Experiential Variables

	Predictor(s) Entered	Beta Weight	Multiple R/ Adj. R Sq.	Increment in R Sq.
Difficulty				
Math	Difficulty	.30*	.47***/.22	.23***
	Hard Work	.25*	.51***/.24	.03*
Music	Difficulty	.58***	.58***/.34	.34***
P.E.	Difficulty	.32**	.45***/.19	.20***
	Help	-.22*	.48***/.22	.03*
Reading	Hard Work	.39***	.39***/.15	.15***
Social Studies	difficulty	.45***	.45***/.19	.20***
Interest				
Math	Interest	.42***	.42***/.16	.17***
Music	Interest	.38***	.38***/.14	.15***
P.E.	Interest	.47***	.47***/.21	.22***
Reading	Interest	.37***	.37***/.13	.14***
Social Studies	Interest	.30**	.47***/.21	.22***
	Difficulty	-.26*	.51***/.25	.04*
Hard Work				
Math	Hard Work	.47***	.47***/.21	.22***
Music	Difficulty	.43***	.58***/.33	.34***
	Help	-.24*	.61***/.36	.03*
P.E.	Hard Work	.37***	.37***/.13	.14***
Reading	Hard Work	.39***	.39***/.15	.15***
Social Studies	Difficulty	.53***	.53***/.27	.28***
School Mark				
Math	Expected Mark	.48***	.48***/.23	.23***
Music	Difficulty	-.41***	.55***/.30	.31***
	Interest	.26**	.59***/.34	.05**
P.E.	Help	.47***	.44***/.18	.19***
	Difficulty	.43***	.47***/.21	.03*
	Interest	.36**	.53***/.26	.06**
Reading	Help	.31**	.31**/.09	.09**
Social Studies	Interest	.24*	.50***/.24	.25***
	School Mark	.25*	.54***/.28	.04*
	Help	.19*	.56***/.30	.03*

Note.
N=102 or 103.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 2

Intercorrelations Among Participants' Reported Experience for Each of Five School Subjects

Math	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Difficulty	---	-.53***	.71***	-.65***	-.45***	-.62***
2. Interest		---	-.52***	.43***	.36***	.41***
3. Hard Work			---	-.59***	-.44***	-.61***
4. School Mark				---	.59***	.49***
5. Expected Mark					---	.61***
6. Help						---

Music	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Difficulty	---	-.56***	.52***	-.60***	-.49***	-.65***
2. Interest		---	-.30***	.49***	.37***	.56***
3. Hard Work			---	-.42***	-.20*	-.40***
4. School Mark				---	.57***	.48***
5. Expected Mark					---	.54***
6. Help						---

P.E.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Difficulty	---	-.71***	.65***	-.69***	-.57***	-.56***
2. Interest		---	-.54***	.63***	.51***	.57***
3. Hard Work			---	-.60***	-.49***	-.52***
4. School Mark				---	.81***	.59***
5. Expected Mark					---	.60***
6. Help						---

Reading	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Difficulty	---	-.53***	.75***	-.73***	-.50***	-.36***
2. Interest		---	-.39***	.52***	.41***	.33***
3. Hard Work			---	-.60***	-.40***	-.38***
4. School Mark				---	.76***	.39***
5. Expected Mark					---	.42***
6. Help						---

Social Studies	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Difficulty	---	-.64***	.52***	-.57***	-.39***	-.45***
2. Interest		---	-.51***	.65***	.50***	.49***
3. Hard Work			---	-.49***	-.38***	-.37***
4. School Mark				---	.62***	.34***
5. Expected Mark					---	.47***
6. Help						---

Note.
N=102 or 103.
*p < .05. ***p < .001.